

Edutourism on campus

LEISURE AND LEARNING: Tapping into edutourism to not only boost income but also nurture lifelong learning

ZULITA MUSTAFA
zulita@nst.com.my

MOHAMAD Nazim Khan, 23, has had a passion for horses since he was 4.

The second-year Bachelor of Agriculture student, majoring in Animal Science at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), spends his free time at UPM Equine Park, taking care of horses and training them.

An equestrian horse trainer at the park since two years ago, Mohamad Nazim volunteers two hours at the equine park every day. Twenty-one horses, including stallions and mares, require intensive care.

"I put theories into practice at the equine park. The university programme covers a range of animals but I get to focus on one in my final year," he said.

Mohammad Nazim, who has hearing problems, was trained in speech by her mother through a form of therapy involving horses, which explains his early and abiding interest in all things equestrian.

"I look after nine horses. My daily routine involves bathing them, feeding them carrots and sugar cubes, and leading them for a walk around the park.

"As an equestrian trainer, I teach horse-riding. We offer 10-hour packages for students (RM200), staff/alumni (RM400) and the public (RM600)."

Mohammad Nazim also helps to promote UPM's edutourism packages, which were launched in 2013. Nine public universities in the country offer these packages. In addition to UPM, they include Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Teknologi Mara, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, University of Malaya, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and Universiti Utara Malaysia.

WHAT EDUTOURISM IS ALL ABOUT

Edutourism is travel for the purpose of formal or informal education and lifelong learning in unique natural, historical and multi-cultural environments.

However, the names and formats vary in countries. Despite the differences, all forms of educational tourism have a number of things in common. For example, educational tourism is about self-improvement, relaxation and learning in a fun environment, and is for people of all ages.

It can be in the form of school trips, study abroad experiences, seminar



Mohammad Nazim Khan

vacations, skill enhancement holidays or educational cruises.

The last few decades have witnessed an important growth in student mobility across countries for the purpose of studies. This new type of tourism is known as "academic tourism", defined as a distinct type of tourism that includes any stay in higher education institutions at places outside a student's usual environment for a period of less than one year.

The aim is to complete degree-level studies in universities and/or attend language courses organised by these centres.

In Malaysia, the idea to develop edutourism packages came about during the Visit My Campus meeting on Jan 10, 2014 attended by Higher Education Ministry Secretary-General Dr Zaini Ujang.

As local universities own vast resources and facilities, these can be shared with the public.

The edutourism project is aligned with the third initiative of the University Community Transformation Centre under the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS), which allows access to university courses and facilities which are not fully utilised.

Edutourism packages offer the opportunity to combine leisure with guided experiential learning. Participants are exposed to unique sets of knowledge-based attractions that may lead to positive change in perception and attitude.

This initiative is a collaboration between the Higher Education Ministry, Tourism and Culture Ministry as well as Tourism Malaysia, alongside select tour agencies.

Last year, the Higher Education Ministry, in partnership with



Visitors to the **Putra Dairy Farm** at eDU-PARK in UPM can feed the calves in addition to watching cows being milked.

the Tourism and Culture Ministry through Tourism Malaysia, took another step forward in its efforts to promote the country on a global stage by launching the Malaysia 101 Edutourism Packages to mark Higher Education Week Malaysia.

This strategic partnership enables public higher education institutions to put together educational tour packages for the public and the international community so as to provide a more holistic education, in line with the concept "Beyond a Degree".

WHAT UNIVERSITIES OFFER

UPM Associate Professor Dr Faridah Qamaruz Zaman, 48, who is also eDU-PARK Division deputy director, said her role is to spearhead the development of the eDU-PARK edutourism programme and expand its role beyond the university.

"eDU-PARK was conceived as an NBOS initiative and its purpose is to provide modules of experiential learning which are fun and interactive.

"Through visitors that consist of preschoolers, students and families, eDU-PARK bridges the university and the community," said Faridah, who lectures at the Biology Department, Faculty of Science.

Since its inception in 2013, the division now has 11 places of interest within the campus for visitors to join a guided tour that allows learning through experience for all ages.

At Farm Feed Fun @ UPM, mingle with animals such as cattle, deer and horses; visit exhibitions; tour the Malay Heritage Museum, Gallery Serdang, Park Conservatory, Museum of Human Anatomy and Museum of Animal Anatomy; watch a cooking demonstration by chefs at the L'apprenti UPM; and buy UPM products.

UMS Ecocampus Management Centre director Associate Professor Dr Justin Sentian, 48, said the centre was established in 2013 with the aim



At the **Deer Farm** in UPM, visitors can feed the animals food pellets.

to support the university in transforming the idea of sustainability into reality based on five core values — sustainable development, ecological protection, environmental compatibility, resource conservation and environmental stewardship.

The transformation is driven by six key elements — mindset change, infrastructure development, teaching and learning, research themes, management and operational practices.

"Guided by these core values, the centre has established the UMS Ecocampus Plan 2015-2020, which highlights the EcoCampus UMS Strategic Plan for a Green University," he said.

Campus tourism is one of many activities that supports the EcoCampus core values.

"We want to enhance the campus

experience for tourists and visitors. Endowed with unsurpassed beauty and richness of the land and sea, UMS is a showcase of sustainable tourism," he added.

Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun launched the EcoCampus Visitors Information Centre (EVIC) on Aug 3.

EVIC houses a souvenir shop, a centralised ticketing office for the attractions on campus, a tourist information gallery and a cafe.

"Visitors can buy tour packages here. To support green travel, buggies transport visitors to the attractions on campus."

The centre offers four tours — Gallery and Museum, Nature Delight, Architecture Heritage and Sunset —

and the Nature Education Camp.

Two more tour packages — Night in the Forest and Bird-Watching — are in the pipeline.

POTENTIAL IT BRINGS

Though edutourism is rather new in the country, Faridah said the potential of eDU-PARK is far-reaching in its innovativeness.

"It generates an income for UPM. eDU-PARK is also a training ground for university students, who act as tour guides, to enhance their soft skills."

Guided eDU-PARK tours are interactive and compatible with the tagline Play, Learn and Stay Young.

"The tours engage visitors with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

"With the collaboration of volunteer students from the Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, 40 SMK Bandar Baru Sri Sendayan, Negri Sembilan students visited UPM. These visits motivate them to continue their studies at a higher level."

For UMS, the rebranding of ecotourism within the university into ecoCampus tourism took place as most of its tourism products are not

Students from the **Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, UPM** listening attentively to their lecturer.

strictly "eco", for example the museum and galleries.

"However, in general, ecotourism or nature tourism is synonymous with Sabah.

"EVIC is a catalyst for ecoCampus tourism. It will propel UMS' visibility on the tourism map in Sabah as well as in the country."

EcoCampus and EVIC collaborate with student representatives and various student organisations within the campus.

"Student volunteers play important roles as tourist guides, interpreters, cashiers at our cafe and souvenir shop or buggy drivers.

"Taking on these roles is part of their industrial training. It will improve their communication skills and boost their confidence in dealing with people."

BRINGING UNIVERSITIES CLOSER TO COMMUNITIES



Mohamed Shafiq Ayub

MOHAMED Shafiq Ayub, 26, a final-year Master's in Corporate Communication student at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), said his volunteerism work started when the faculty organised a seminar on Agriculture and Communication for students from various universities.

"As part of the activities, an eDU-PARK officer took us for a visit to the farms on campus. As communication students, we realised this park will greatly benefit the public.

"And this has inspired us to volunteer, particularly in eDU-



Shirley Teo Suat Li

PARK's promotional activities and tours," added Mohamed Shafiq.

"It is one small way to serve the community and the university. I believe engaging with the public on interactive educational tours will help them to widen their knowledge.

"Our service as volunteers helps to bring the university closer to the community. It will also improve our interpersonal communication skills," he added.

Shirley Teo Suat Li, 26, who is also pursuing the same programme, has similar experiences as Mohamed Shafiq.

"I have been an avid volunteer



Jessica Samson

since my undergraduate days when I helped the needy.

"At eDU-PARK, you feed deer, watch the process of milking cows, see the anatomies of animals at the museum and ride a horse, all within the vicinity of UPM," said Teo, who helps to promote the park on social media and volunteers as a tour guide along with postgraduate student Jessica Samson, 27, among others.

"As a UPM student, I want to explore the campus. I want more people to have as enthralling an experience as I had," said Jessica, who has volunteered at an animal shelter and orphanages.